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**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY AT THE CONFEREE MEETING ON THE  
COLLEGE COST REDUCTION ACT OF 2007**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

There are few issues more important to the future of our nation than the one before us today. By making college more affordable for young Americans, we not only open doors of opportunity for them, but we equip a new generation of Americans to compete and win in the global economy.

We are hopeful that we can move this important piece of legislation forward without delay and take advantage of the window before both the House and Senate recess for the Jewish holidays next week. We are also committed to moving forward promptly with our Higher Education reauthorization bill. That is an equally important piece of legislation and Chairman Miller has committed to working with us to complete action on that legislation in the next few weeks.

Both the House and Senate bills provide an historic investment in student aid -- the largest since the G.I. bill.

The landmark success of the GI Bill shows us what a difference higher education makes. The bill granted veterans up to \$500 each term-- the equivalent of \$5,600 today. It swung the gates to college wide open -- and half of all veterans went through those gates determined to create a new life for themselves and their families. And for every dollar we invested, the nation saw a seven dollar return because of the significant contributions of those who were able to obtain a college degree.

More than five million veterans received vocational education or job training, and more than two million attended college.

It produced 67,000 doctors, 91,000 scientists, 238,000 teachers, and 450,000 engineers. It also funded the education of three Presidents -- three Supreme Court Justices and about a dozen Senators.

Today, we need a similar bold new commitment to enable the current generation of Americans to rise to the global challenges we face. Chairman Miller and I are committed to ensuring that the final Conference Report does just that.

In the Senate, this also has been a shared goal. Senator Enzi and I have worked closely together and with our Committee Members on a strong bipartisan package.

I have shared with Chairman Miller several key priorities for Senate Conferees, including:

- Prioritizing funding for the Pell grant and maintaining a substantial increase in the maximum Pell grant;
- Providing debt relief to those struggling with increasing student debt levels through flexible repayment plans and loan forgiveness;
- Protecting working students by not penalizing their earnings.

The Senate bill also reflected the priority of several of our Members by recognizing that non-profit lenders in their states invest much of their profits in students.

We believe we can move forward with a package that respects these priorities, as well as those of our colleagues in the House.

Our students and families deserve fast action on this legislation.

We all know that a college education is more important than ever, but it's never been more expensive. The cost of college has tripled in the last 20 years.

Yet, family incomes are not keeping up with rapidly-rising college prices. Last week, the Census Bureau released new data showing that median household income in America increased just seven-tenths of one percent last year. Meanwhile, the cost of college increased 6 percent.

Grant aid has not kept up pace with increasing costs. Twenty years ago, the maximum Pell Grant covered 55 percent of costs at a public four-year college. Today, it covers only a third of those costs.

As a result, each year, 400,000 students don't attend a 4-year college because they can't afford to do so.

In 1993, fewer than half of all students took out loans to finance their education, but today, more than two-thirds of students borrow for college.

No student should have to mortgage his or her future in order to pay for higher education today.

For many years, Congress was guided by one clear principle with respect to higher education – that no qualified student should be denied the opportunity to attend college because of the cost.

I recall how important that principle was for President Kennedy. My brother believed very strongly that if you work hard, study hard, and get accepted to college, you should be able to attend the college of your choice – without regard to cost.

That view resonated powerfully with students and families, and it helped create the groundswell that led to the creation of the Higher Education Act five years later.

We've lost sight of that principle in recent years, but with this legislation, we will renew it once again.

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